

GREG STANTON
ARIZONA'S FOURTH DISTRICT

WASHINGTON OFFICE
207 CANNON BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-9888

DISTRICT OFFICE
1220 S. ALMA SCHOOL ROAD, STE. 209
MESA, ARIZONA 85210
(602) 956-2463

STANTON.HOUSE.GOV



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

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WESTERN HEMISPHERE SUBCOMMITTEE

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE STRATEGIC
COMPETITION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES
AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY**

April 27, 2026

The Honorable Joseph V. Cuffari
Inspector General
Office of Inspector General
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane SW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Inspector General Cuffari:

As Ranking Member of the Subcommittee with jurisdiction over the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), I am requesting that your office open an investigation into whether the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has directed FEMA personnel to support immigration enforcement activities in ways that may undermine FEMA's disaster readiness and violate statutory protections enacted by Congress after Hurricane Katrina.

Following FEMA's widely documented failures during Hurricane Katrina, Congress conducted an extensive review of the agency's structure and authorities.¹ That review concluded that when FEMA was placed within DHS after the September 11 attacks, too much operational control over FEMA had been consolidated under the DHS Secretary. Congress determined that this contributed to FEMA's inability to maintain the independence, readiness, and mission clarity required for effective disaster response.²

To correct these systemic weaknesses, Congress enacted the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA), which established critical safeguards to ensure FEMA could operate independently within DHS and remain focused on its core mission.³ Among its key provisions, PKEMRA:

¹ Sage Journals. *Congress and Katrina: A Failure of Oversight*. December 2007. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0160323X0703900103>

² Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina. *A Failure of Initiative*. February 16, 2006. Available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-109hrpt377/pdf/CRPT-109hrpt377.pdf>

³ GAO. *Actions Taken to Implement the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006*. November 21, 2008. Available at: <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-09-59r>

- Prohibits the Secretary from taking any action—including reorganization, transfer of functions, or budgetary changes—that would “substantially or significantly reduce the authorities, responsibilities, or functions of [FEMA] or the capability of the Agency to perform those missions.”⁴
- Requires FEMA to remain a distinct entity within DHS, explicitly exempting it from the Secretary’s general reorganization authority.⁵
- Provides the FEMA Administrator with dual reporting lines, including direct reporting to the President during major disasters, to preserve operational autonomy and ensure FEMA’s disaster response capabilities cannot be subordinated to unrelated departmental priorities.⁶

I am concerned that DHS’s reported use of FEMA personnel to support immigration enforcement activities may violate these statutory protections and compromise FEMA’s ability to fulfill its mission.

In an open letter to Congress, FEMA whistleblowers warned that PKEMRA’s safeguards are being disregarded in several significant ways.⁷ According to their account, FEMA employees have been detailed or reassigned to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at a time when FEMA is already operating at reduced capacity due to widespread staff departures through deferred resignations and voluntary retirements. Whistleblowers further reported that employees who decline reassignment to ICE have been threatened with termination. They also described severe workforce erosion caused by hiring freezes, the cancellation of critical support contracts, and programs that incentivized employees to leave federal service. As a result, one-third of FEMA’s full-time staff reportedly departed the agency in a single year, leading to the loss of institutional knowledge and long-standing operational relationships essential to FEMA’s mission.⁸

Additional reporting reinforces these concerns. In August, it was reported that approximately 100 FEMA human resources employees were reassigned to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to assist with recruitment efforts and support ICE’s stated goal of hiring 10,000 new agents.⁹ In March 2026, civilian employees at the Department of Defense received a notice soliciting volunteers for an ICE detail, directing interested employees to apply through

⁴ 6 U.S.C § 313

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Katrina Declaration and Petition to Congress. August 25, 2025. Available at: <https://www.standupforscience.net/fema-katrina-declaration>

⁸ Id.

⁹ Washington Post. Dozens of FEMA Staffers Involuntarily Reassigned to Support Deportations. August 6, 2025. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/08/06/fema-ice-mass-deportations-dhs/>; Reuters. Trump Administration Shifts FEMA Staff to ICE During Hurricane Season. August 6, 2025. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/08/06/fema-ice-mass-deportations-dhs/>

FEMA.¹⁰ These actions indicate that FEMA personnel and resources are being redirected to support immigration enforcement activities rather than FEMA's core mission of disaster preparedness and response.

Taken together, these allegations suggest that FEMA's disaster response capabilities may have been significantly weakened by directives requiring FEMA personnel to support activities outside the agency's statutory mission. If accurate, these actions could constitute violations of PKEMRA and undermine the nation's preparedness for catastrophic disasters.

Given the seriousness of these concerns, I respectfully request that the Office of Inspector General open an immediate investigation into DHS's use of FEMA personnel for immigration enforcement activities, including whether such actions have diminished FEMA's ability to fulfill its congressionally mandated mission and whether they are consistent with the requirements and limitations established under PKEMRA.

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, under House Rule X, has jurisdiction over multiple DHS mission areas—including the Coast Guard and federal management of emergencies and natural disasters.

I look forward to your prompt response. If you have any questions, please contact Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Democratic staff at (202) 226-8776.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Greg Stanton".

Greg Stanton
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Public Buildings,
Economic Development, and
Emergency Management

¹⁰ Message obtained by the Subcommittee, sent from Timothy D. Dill, Assistant Secretary of War to Department of War Civilian Employees. Copy available upon request.